



Finding solutions. Generating success.

A passion for life and serving others (North Iowa Neighbors)

Globe Gazette
www.globegazette.com
Mason City, IA
October 8, 2007

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MASON CITY — About 20 years ago, Steve Faulkner, Mason City, learned he had a life-changing disease. But one thing remained stable — his positive attitude.

The hereditary condition is retinitis pigmentosa, which slowly robbed Faulkner of his sight. A dentist, Faulkner had to give up his career in 1987. He is nearly blind today.

“At first it was very different because I didn’t know what to do,” Faulkner said. “I thought the world was closing in on me.”

However, he quickly developed a plan and realized he still had a lot to offer.

“He’s never felt sorry for himself,” said his wife, Leanne. “Steve is such a positive person.”

Now he uses his positive attitude to help other people with disabilities through his work as supervisor at the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) area office in Mason City. He’s worked there since 1989.

“I’m very fired up about working,” Faulkner said. “I think people with disabilities have a lot to offer. I’m here to tell people, ‘Yes, we can do this,’ and tell employers



not to forget about us.”

He chose a career at IVRS because it included the things he liked about being a dentist.

“I liked looking at medical history and working with patients and planning,” Faulkner said. “I liked working with people to accomplish things.”

His work recently earned him the Governor’s Award from the Iowa Commission of Persons with Disabilities. He received the honor Oct. 5 in Des Moines.

The award is given to an Iowan with a disability who has done the most to enhance the empowerment and employment of other people with disabilities, according to a news release from the organization.

Allen Geilenfeld, a counselor with IVRS, said Faulkner is a good spokesman and is inspiring to individuals with impairments.

“Steve has made some decisions in his life based on his own disability and has never let it stand in

his way in terms of accomplishments in himself and his family’s life,” he said. “The example he’s shown to people is even though he has a significant disability you can overcome that.”

Faulkner said “it’s disastrous” for someone who is or becomes disabled.

He shares his story to help inspire them and let them know they can get jobs and still contribute to society.

“It’s a very rewarding field to help someone see the light at the end of the tunnel,” Faulkner said.

The area IVRS serves 900 people at any given time. Last year it helped 178 people find employment.

Those 178 people couldn’t have found success without a positive attitude, Faulkner said.

“The main thing is it takes a lot of work to prepare to be successful for work, but put forth that effort and get help,” he advises individuals with disabilities. “Find out what skills are needed in the community and develop them and get the confidence.”

He also gives motivational speeches around Iowa.

“I feel blessed,” he said. “I have a great job, great family and I own a home.”

Steve and Leanne have two children, James, 17 and Stephanie, 14.